

Curious Insights into New College Library's MS 280

New College Library's MS 280 is an example of excellent quality. It has notable dimensions (25.7 x 18 cm), is voluminous (ff. iv + 202 + ii^r; mutilated leaf between f. 202 and i^r; blank ff. 150v, 202v), and is beautifully decorated. The fine parchment of its folios provides generous margins and hosts a text block (15.7 x 10.4 cm) of 26 lines per page, ruled in a very light lead.¹

This codex contains Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Romana* (ff. 1r–92r); an anonymous *List of Emperors* (ff. 92r–94r), from Augustus to Justinus in the sixth century (*Imperatores Romae vel Constantinopolim regnantes*; incipit: *Augustus regnavit annos quinquaginta sex* — explicit: *per annos novem dies viginti quattuor morbo periit*); Victor Vitensis, *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae* (ff. 94v–150r); and Pomponius Mela, *De chorographia* (ff. 151r–202v).

The very elegant hand that copied the text has been attributed to Thomas Candour (mid-15th century); therefore, the manuscript can be dated to the third quarter of the 15th century. A curious detail, as Crivellucci observed, is that the script of the final work is in a larger module.² Additionally, the title '*Eutropius et Mela*' written on ff. iir and iir by two different, later hands, fails to mention the work of Victor Vitensis. In fact, this appears to belong to the same codicological unit as that of Paul the Deacon, ending at f. 150r and with f. 150v blank. One possible explanation is that the two works were originally conceived as separate codicological units and were later combined by the person overseeing the manuscript's production. The characteristics of Candour's hand, the different phases of his work, and his tendency toward polygraphism have been described by Albinia de la Mare.³

The provenance of the manuscript and the identity of its exemplar are difficult to determine, largely due to Candour's extensive travels across Italy and Europe on behalf of the Pope.⁴ Nonetheless, certain details about the codex's history can still be discerned. For instance, the words *Ego Edwardus*, written in a late 15th-century hand on f. i^r (f. 203v), may be interpreted as a mark of ownership. Unfortunately, no additional clues are available. However, a 16th-century hand attempted to interpret the expression by adding a brief explanatory note beside it, written in very small script:

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¹ Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogus codicum MSS. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1852), p. 98, no. CCLXXX; Amedeo Crivellucci, 'Per l'edizione della *Historia Romana* di Paolo Diacono', in *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano* 40 (1921), 7–103, at p. 19, no. 19; J. J. G. Alexander and Elżbieta Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts in Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives and the Taylor Institution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 59, no. 605. The draft entry for this manuscript in the forthcoming catalogue of New College Library manuscripts currently gives: 'The first evidence for the book's presence at New College is John Leland's select list of titles which he saw there in 1535'.

² The text of Paul the Deacon, according to Crivellucci, is related to London, British Library, 15.B.XVI and its manuscript group.

³ The outline of his biography is provided by A. B. Emden, *A Biographical register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957–9), III, 2158–9. Albinia C. de la Mare, 'Humanistic Hands in England', in *Manuscripts at Oxford: An Exhibition in Memory of Richard William Hunt (1908–1979), Keeper of Western Manuscripts and the Bodleian Library 1945–1975, on Themes Selected and Described by Some of his Friends*, ed. Albinia C. de la Mare and B. C. Barker-Benfield (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1980), pp. 93–102, at pp. 95–6. See also David Rundle, 'The Scribe Thomas Candour and the Making of Poggio Bracciolini's English Reputation', in *Scribes and Transmission in English Manuscripts 1400–1700*, ed. Peter Beal and A. S. G. Edwards (London: British Library, 2005), pp. 1–25, and his *The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain: The English Quattrocento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 100–105.

⁴ On Candour, his travels and connections see David Rundle, 'Poggio Bracciolini's International Reputation and the Significance of Bryn Mawr, MS. 48', in *Poggio Bracciolini and the Re(dis)covery of Antiquity: Textual and Material Traditions*, ed. Robert Ricci with Eric L. Pumroy (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2020), pp. 41–70.

Commentarius:

Ego grecus est vocabulum et ambiguum inter authores; hic tamen habet significationem oculi; plura legetis de isto vocabulo apud grecos quam apud latinos.

Edwardus vocabulum ambiguitatis et dubitationis plenum nisi resolvatur in partes. Alie sunt partes integrales alie substantiales sed non immorabimur istis; ad primam partem vocabulum. e. est prepositio d. ante in ornatus gratia. Ward significat carcerem aut supplicii locum, sic ut e. sit carceratus, d. est augmentum sillabicum, us aliter nos latine literae (?) grece; manifestiora ista reddere non possumus quia scriptor suboscure est.

‘Commentary:

“Ego” is a Greek word ambiguous among the authors, this means “oculi”. You can read a lot about this word among Greek as well as Latin authors.

“Edwardus” is a word ambiguous and dubious if one does not divide it in sections. Some of them are integral, others substantial, but we shall not linger on these; in the first part of the word “e” is the preposition, “d” is before [Ward] as an ornament, “Ward” means prison or place of punishment. Therefore, “e” could mean “imprisoned”, “d” is a syllabic increase, “us” is in the literature (?) in Latin as well as in Greek. We cannot make this information clearer because the writer is very much obscure’.⁵

The passage is an attempt—though confused and obscure—to analyse the meanings and etymology of the words ‘I’ and ‘Edwardus’ from a classical perspective, blending Greek and Latin references. ‘I’ is described as a Greek word with multiple meanings, possibly connected to *oculi* (eyes), and is discussed ambiguously in both Greek and Latin literature. ‘Edwardus’ is called a dubious word unless broken down: ‘e’ is interpreted as a preposition meaning ‘out of’ or possibly implying imprisonment; ‘d’ is seen as a syllabic addition; ‘ward’ is taken to mean ‘prison’ or ‘place of punishment’; ‘us’ is noted as a common ending in both Latin and Greek literature. The writer admits the analysis is unclear due to the obscure nature of the original source. In short, it’s a speculative and murky linguistic breakdown of ‘I’ and ‘Edwardus’ with unclear conclusions. The most interesting aspect of the annotation is the attempt to explain the meaning of the word *ego* as *oculi* (eyes). This could be justified if we consider that the writer of the note may have been referring to the Middle English word *eie* or *eighe* (meaning ‘eye’).⁶

Another possible clue regarding the events to which the manuscript was subjected is the systematic expunging of the word *papa* in all its occurrences within the section of Paul the Deacon’s text: ff. 79r (*Hist.* 14.12); 87v (16.3); 88r (16.5); 88v (16.8); 89r (16.10); 89v (16.13); 91r (16.18); and 91v (16.19, 21). This appears to have been a deliberate effort to purge the codex of any references to papal authority. Although these interventions cannot be precisely dated, they were clearly carried out after the text had been copied, by erasing the manuscript’s text.

An interesting feature of this manuscript is the nature and content of its *marginalia*, which—like the main text—may also be attributed to the hand of Thomas Candour (a hypothesis proposed in the catalogue of New College manuscripts, currently in preparation). While the script modules differ, the graphic characteristics support this attribution. Therefore, the marginal notes may have been added during successive and distinct readings of the text.

In the section of the codex containing Paul the Deacon’s *Historia Romana* (ff. 1r–92r), the annotator is particularly active. Notably, the text is divided into paragraphs, numbered in the margins—but only up to Book 5. The divisions are as follows: Book 1 (I–XX), Book 2 (I–XXV), Book 3 (I–XVII), Book 4 (I–XXVIII), and Book 5 (I–X). This subdivision is similar, though not identical, to that found in the 10th-century manuscript Oxford, Arch. Selden B.16.

⁵ New College Library, Oxford, MS 280, f. 203v.

⁶ See the *Middle English Dictionary*, University of Michigan: <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>>.

Additionally, some notes aim to make the text more readable and clearer by inserting explanations between the lines, often introduced by the symbol *.i.* (*ides*), and by restoring missing portions of the text in the margins or interlinear spaces. Another symbol used is *.s.* (*scilicet*), which serves to clarify certain references. For example, on f. 152v, in the interlinear space next to the expression *ex Schithico*, he writes *s. oceano*; similarly, above the word *Caspium*, he adds *s. mare*. On other occasions, he provides further clarification or contextual information about a word or historical event—for instance, on f. 42v, in the interlinear space, he notes that *Nola* (*Hist.* 7.10) is an *oppidum Campaniae* (a town in Campania) in Italy, and in the margin he adds that, after his death, the Emperor Augustus *Romae in Campo Martio sepultus est* (was buried in the Campus Martius in Rome).

Alternative readings are also frequently proposed in the margins, introduced by the siglum *al.* (*aliter* / *alii*). A selection of these variants is provided below, following Crivellucci's critical edition of 1914. Comparisons will also be made with Droysen's edition of Eutropius's *Historia Romana*, as Paul the Deacon served as a continuator of that work.⁷

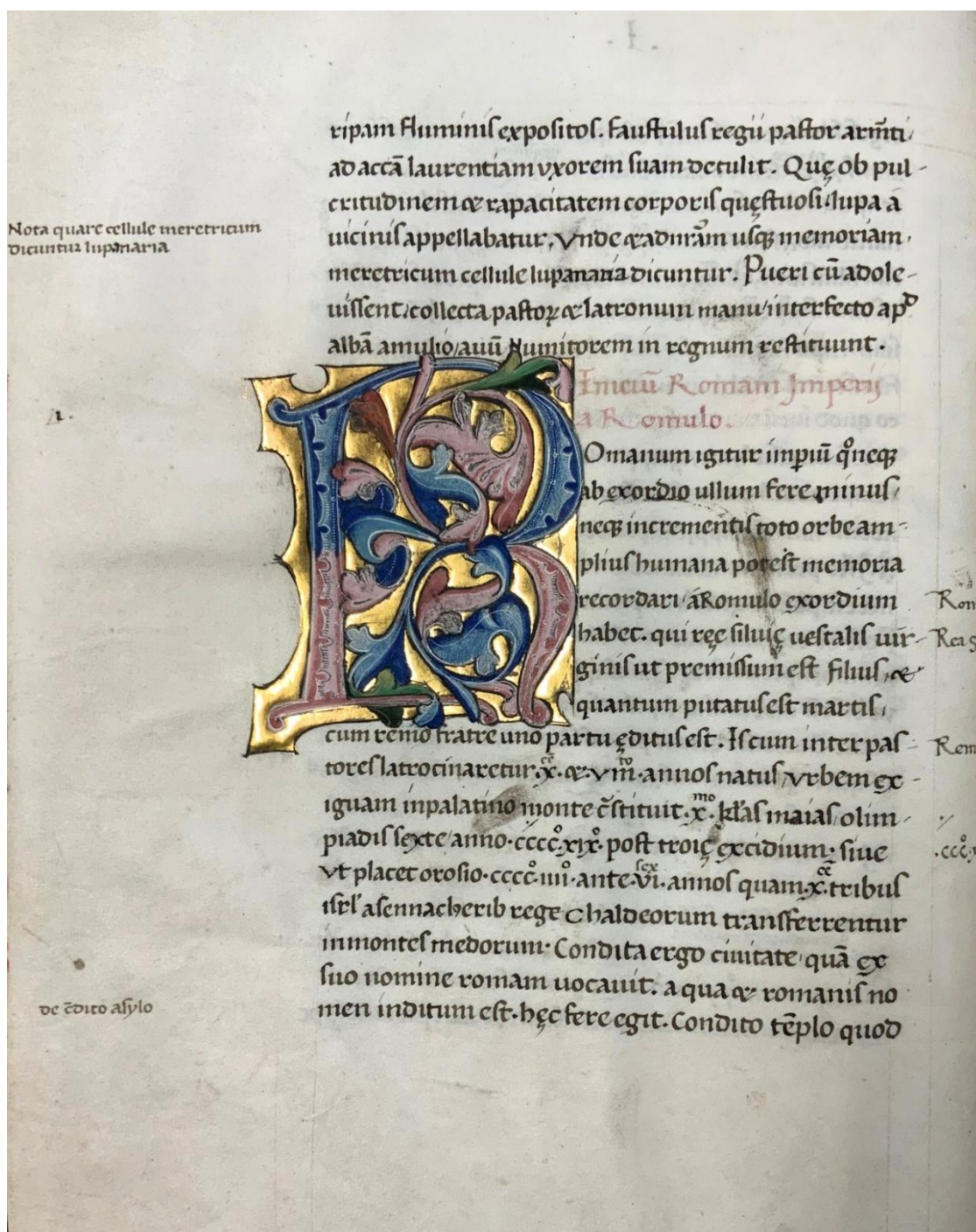
Some readings do not appear significant or necessary and may simply be conjectures made by the annotator: f. 4v (*Hist.* 1.8) *Lautumias*] *al.* *Lautuneas*; f. 5r (*Hist.* 1.9) *conlatinus*] *al.* *Collatinus*; f. 7r (*Hist.* 1.19) *rex ueientium Tolunius*] *al.* *Volunius Rex Vegentium* [the form *Volunius* is not attested, while *Vegentium* is also a reading of LN1]; f. 9r (*Hist.* 2.8) *quinto fabio maximo*] *al.* *Quintus fabius maximus* [not attested, not needed]; f. 11v (*Hist.* 2.18) *CC. Nonaginta II. Milia CCCta. XXX IIIor*] *al.* *CC. XXIIIor milia Romanorum* [in which *duocenta* is N's reading]; f. 12r (*Hist.* 2.21) *amilcarem cartaginiensium ducem*] *al.* *Bomilcarem cartaginiensium ducem, qui male pugnavit* [referring to Bomilcar, 4th century BC]; f. 14r (*Hist.* 2.27) *Gaio Luctatio catulo. aulo postumio albino consulibus*] *al.* *Claudio Lutatatio et Postumio Albino consulibus* [maybe a wrong reading of the abbreviation *C.* for *Gaius* not for *Claudius*]; f. 22v (*Hist.* 4.6) *gentium*] *al.* *Genuntium* [could be an alternative form of the name]; f. 25r (*Hist.* 4.9) *mummius*] *al.* *Nummius* [L]; f. 25v (*Hist.* 4.16) *in Lusitania*] *al.* *in Celtiberia* [*Celtiberia* is mentioned a couple of lines before]; f. 26r (*Hist.* 4.17) *Gaius Hostilius Mancinus*] *al.* *Q. Mancinus* [not needed]; f. 36r (*Hist.* 6.18) *Marcus licinnius crassus*] *al.* *Marcus Lucius crassus interfectus a partis* [not even in *Eutr.*]; f. 38v (*Hist.* 6.24) *pompeii filii Gneus pompeius et sextus pompeius*] *al.* *Q. Pompeius et Sextus pompeius filij pompeii magni* [not even in *Eutr.*]; f. 40v (*Hist.* 7.8) *solus*] *al.* *consul* [not even in *Eutr.*]; f. 43v (*Hist.* 7.14) *blactinis*] *al.* *purpureis* [not needed]; f. 45r (*Hist.* 7.19) *xx oppida*] *al.* *xxx* [not needed]; f. 47v (*Hist.* 8.5) *super colupnam*] *al.* *sub columpna* [restores the correct reading, could also be generated independently].

However, some readings recall closely the text of Eutropius: f. 7v (*Hist.* 2.1) *sutriorum*] *al.* *Sutrinorum* [*Eutr.*]; f. 19v (*Hist.* 3.16) *publius Fabius maximus*] *al.* *Q. Fabius maximus* [Quintus *Eutr.*; Droysen registers it as an addition in *LO ante publius*]; *ibid.* *cartagilonem*] *al.* *Carthalonem* [*Eutr.*]; *ibid.* *claudius marcus*] *al.* *Marcellus* [*Eutr.*]; *ibid.* (*Hist.* 3.18) *apud metaurum fluuium in insidias compositas incidit*] *al.* *Cesena, q [. . .] apud oppressus est hannibal cum exercitu* [Senam, Picensi ciuitatem *Eutr.*, cf. also the Paul the Deacon's manuscript Cheltenham 3075]; f. 22r (*Hist.* 4.4) *contra sipilum magnesiæ asiae ciuitatem a consule*] *al.* *apud Sipilum montem Meandrumque amnem a consule et c(etera)* [sipylum *Eutr.*; Magnesiæ H1, but no trace of the river *Meandrum*, which looks like an addition]; f. 29r (*Hist.* 5.1) *teutomodium*] *al.* *teuthobocum* [Teutobodum *Eutr.*]; f. 30r (*Hist.* 5.3) *legennius*] *al.* *herennius* [Herennius *Eutr.*]; f. 34r (*Hist.* 6.9) *cum vii d. clibanariis et centum milibus sagittariorum*] *al.* *vii^m equitum et c. milibus sagittariorum* [Cum septem milibus quingentis clibanariis etc. *Eutr.*]; f. 34v *cecilius metellus*] *al.* *Q. caecilius* [*Eutr.*]; f. 41r (*Hist.* 7.9) *Non ullo*] *al.* *nullo* [M and *Eutr.*]; (*Hist.* 7.9) *ante cesarem*] *al.* *ante eum* [*Eutr.*]; f. 49r (*Hist.* 8.10) *reuexit*] *al.* *reduxit* [in the manuscripts LOD of *Eutr.*]; f. 50v (*Hist.* 8.18) *glodius albinus*] *al.* *clodius* [L and *Eutr.*]; *ibid.* (*Hist.* 8.19) *per xx duo passuum milia*] *al.* *xxx* (interl.) [Cxxxii *Eutr.* centum triginta et duo L]; f. 55r (*Hist.* 9.18) *Sobenem*] *al.* *Ebotem* [sobenem H1, could also be

⁷ See Amedeo Crivellucci (ed.), *Pauli Diaconi Historia Romana* (Roma: Tipografia del Senato, 1914); H. Droysen (ed.), *Eutropii Breviarium ab urbe condita cum versionibus graecis et Pauli Landolfique additamentis* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1879). The work of Paul the Deacon has been frequently attributed to Eutropius; this time as well without exception, see New College Library, Oxford, MS 280, f. 1r: *Incipit liber Eutropii super Romana Historia*.

generated from the reading *Cochen* in *Eutr.*]. These similarities do not prove a systematic collation against a manuscript of Eutropius, but they could serve as a starting point for a thorough analysis aimed at identifying the archetype of the manuscript New College 280.

Some marginalia engage directly with the text's content, reflecting historical, linguistic, ethnographical, and moral interests. For example, commenting on the passage in f. 2v (*Hist.* 1a), which states that Acca Lucretia was called *lupa* (wolf) because of her beauty and sexual greediness (*ob pulchritudinem et rapacitatem corporis quaestuosi, lupa . . . appellabatur*), the annotator writes: *Nota quare cellae meretricum dicuntur lupanaria* ('Note why the prostitutes' rooms are called *lupanaria*') referred to brothels.



On another occasion, at f. 36r (*Hist.* 6.17), the annotator takes the opportunity to provide specific information about the geographical location of the Helvetii, a tribal group living in Switzerland: *Heluitii [sc. Helvetii] quondam fuere pacenses. Siti inter Alpes et montem Iuram, Renumque et Rodanum contra lacum Lemannum* (Once, the Helvetians were peaceful. Settled between the Alps and the Jura mountains, the Rhine and the Rhône rivers, opposite Lake Geneva). This information does not appear in Paul the Deacon's text but could easily have been sourced from Caesar's *Gallie Wars* (1.1.5; 2.3).

Concerning ethnography, another marginal note on f. 41r summarizes Paul's text (*Hist.* 7.9): *Germanos in Galliam translatos ex quibus captivis colonia super Renum facta est* (The Germans, taken captive and transferred to Gaul, from whom a colony was established across the Rhine). Other summarizing annotations can be found elsewhere, such as on f. 53r (*Hist.* 9.9): *In huius Gallieni imperio in Gallia purpuram assumpserunt variis in locis et temporibus tres tiranni, Marius, Victorinus, Tetricus* (During the reign of Gallienus, in various places and times in Gaul, three tyrants—Marius, Victorinus, and Tetricus—assumed imperial purple); on f. 58v (*Hist.* 10.3): *Factum Constantini de regibus Francorum et Alemannorum* (The act of Constantine concerning the kings of the Franks and Alemanni), referring to Constantine's decision to display the remains of the leaders of these two peoples after their defeat; on f. 61r (*Hist.* 10.16): *Eutropius historiographus expeditioni interfuit in quam Iulianus periit* (The historian Eutropius was present at the expedition in which Julian died); and on f. 80r (*Hist.* 14.17): *Capta Roma secunda vice et spoliata omnis opibus suis* (Rome was taken for the second time and stripped of all her wealth), commenting on the barbarian Gaiseric's attack and sack of the city.

The marginal annotations disappear in the section containing Victor Vitensis's work, only to reappear with considerable frequency in the books of Pomponius Mela's *De chorographia* (ff. 151r–202v). In fact, this is the part of the manuscript with the highest number of marginalia. As in Paul the Deacon's section, the annotations include alternative readings and a large number of simple *notabilia*, mostly reiterating important names found in the text. However, the most interesting feature of this section lies in marginal notes that help clarify the text by providing the names used in the 15th century for the same geographical entities.

For example, on f. 151v, commenting on the passage where Mela (1.5) mentions the 'fourth sea' (*quartum ab occasu*) included by the Ocean in the western region, the annotator writes: *hoc est fretum Gaditanum quod greci Perthemon vocant* (This is the Gaditanus Strait, which the Greeks call Perthemon), likely referring to the Gulf of Cádiz. On f. 152r, he refers to other seas mentioned shortly thereafter (Mela 1.6.4): *hoc vocatur Elespontum* (this is called the Hellespont); *hoc vocatur Propontis* (this is called the Propontis); *hoc vocatur Tratius Bosforus* (this is called the Thracian Bosphorus), meaning the Bosphorus Strait; *hic est Pontus Euxinus* (this is the Pontus Euxinus), meaning the Black Sea; and *hoc vocatur Cymerius Bosforus* (this is called the Cimmerian Bosphorus), referring to the Kerch Strait.

Other marginalia provide the contemporary names of certain geographical entities. For example, on f. 152r (Mela 1.7), the annotator writes: *Pontus Euxinus est quod nunc dicitur Mare magnum, palus Meotis nunc dicitur il mare delle Sabache* (The Pontus Euxinus is what is now called the Big Sea; the Maeotis marsh is now called the Mare delle Sabache). These names were used by Genoese and Venetian merchants in the 15th and 16th centuries: *Mare magnum* refers to the Black Sea, also known as *Mare Maggiore*, while *Mare delle Sabache* likely corresponds to the so-called *Mare delle Zabacche*.⁸ Later f. 172r (Mela 2.24) *In Bosporus Bizantium nunc Constantinopolis* (In the Bosphorus Strait [there is] Byzantium, which now [is called] Constantinopolis); f. 173v (Mela 2.35) *Axius flumen prope Thessalonicens qui nunc dicitur Salonichi* (The river Axius, near Thessalonica, which is called Salonichi) transliterating the coeval pronunciation of the Greek name *Σαλονίκη*; f. 179v (Mela 2.76) *Nicea, idest nipsa in vulgari* (Nicea, that is Nipsa in vulgar), the vulgar name for the city of İznik is not known; f. 181v (Mela 2.90) *Barchino, idest Barselone in vulgari* (Barchino, that is Barcelona in vulgar);

⁸ See for instance Giovanni B. Ramusio, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*, 2 vols (Venezia: Stamperia dei Giunti, 1574), II, 15; 'zabacche' or 'trabacche' were apparently the Italian names for the Mongolian yurts.

f. 184v (Mela 2.114) *Carphatos in vulgari dicitur Scarpanto* (The [isle of] Carphatos in vulgar is called Scarpanto); f. 187v (Mela 3.6) *Lusitania modo dicitur Portugal* (The Lusitania [region] now is called Portugal); a couple of annotations on the population of the Cantabri: f. 188r (Mela 3.12) *Cantabri modo dicuntur Vasconi* (The Cantabri now are called Vasconi); f. 188v (Mela 3.15) *Cantabri puto nunc dicantur Vascones* (I think that the Cantabri are now called Vasconi).

Another interesting marginal annotation refers to the *margaritae* (pearls) for which Scotland was famous: on f. 194v (Mela 3.51), the annotator notes, *Etiam modo sunt perle qui dicuntur de Schotia* (Even nowadays there are pearls said [to come] from Scotland), using the vernacular *perle* instead of the Latin *margaritae*. As early as the 14th century, Scottish pearls—harvested from freshwater mussels—were used as inexpensive substitutes for oriental pearls.⁹

Some authors like Virgil are mentioned and precisely quoted: f. 185r (Mela 2.117) *Virgilius in bucolica in x egloga scribit hos uersus de fonte arethusa vero: Sic tibi cum fluctus subterlabere Sicanos / Doris amara suam non intermisceat undam* (Virgil writes in the 10th eclogue these verses about the Arethusa spring: ‘So, when thou beneath Sicanian billows glidest on, / may Doris blend no bitter wave with thine’) on Verg. *eclog.* 10.4-5 about the tale of the river Alpheus and the Arethusa spring. Another accurate quotation is from Lucan 2.716: f. 189v (Mela 2.99) *Simplegades vel Cyanice, unde Lucanus: Cyaonas tellus emisit in equora cautes* (The isles Symplegades or Cyanicae, from where Lucan: ‘The land of Cyanean rocks thrust its cliffs into the sea’) the Symplegades Isles were also known as the Cyanean Rocks (Κυανέαι). The references to Caesar’s *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* are rather vague. For example, on f. 189r (Mela 3.19), the annotator writes: *Nota Druidas etiam in commentariis Caesaris* (Note that the Druids are also mentioned in Caesar’s Commentaries), likely referring to Caes. *Gall.* 6.13; on f. 190r (Mela 3.26): *Lege etiam de more Germanorum in commentariis Caesaris* (Also read about the customs of the Germans in Caesar’s Commentaries), especially referring to Caes. *Gall.* 6.21–28; and on f. 190v (Mela 3.29): *De Silvia Hercynia lege in Commentariis Ce.* (Read about the Hercynian Forest in Caesar’s Commentaries), referring to Caes. *Gall.* 6.24–25.

At this stage, it is not possible to draw precise conclusions about the annotator. However, we can say with good probability that, based on the handwriting characteristics, it is the same hand that wrote the text and repeatedly added the extensive marginal apparatus to Paul the Deacon and Pomponius Mela. The annotator’s interests mainly focused on historical events, names of historical figures, ethnography, and geography. He was familiar with Caesar’s *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* and was able to cite Virgil and Lucan, possibly with the aid of a manuscript. Nonetheless, these are citations from two well-known and studied texts of the 15th century, so they cannot provide conclusive evidence. Still, it is hoped that the information provided here may offer some leads for anyone wishing to conduct a more in-depth comparison.

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⁹ Michael Bycroft and Sven Dupré, ‘Introduction: Gems in the Early Modern World’, and Michael Bycroft, ‘Boethius de Boodt and the Emergence of the Oriental/Occidental Distinction in European Mineralogy’, in *Gems in the Early Modern World: Materials, Knowledge and Global Trade, 1450–1800*, ed. Michael Bycroft and Sven Dupré (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1–32 and 149–72, at pp. 16, 155.